

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Farming Lease – Elk Island Wildlife Management Area

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The 1,525-acre Elk Island WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. The proposal is to renew an agricultural lease agreement with Wade Hagler for three years (2014-2016) on 152 acres of the WMA. As proposed, the lessee would cultivate, plant, and harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, leaving 25 percent of crops and 35 percent of irrigated hay standing for wildlife during winter months. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing and harvested crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Environmental Assessment for the project was released on Jan. 27, with comments accepted through Feb.16. FWP received one comment representing one individual in support of the agricultural lease. FWP issued its decision notice on Feb. 26 in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on Commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under the "no action" alternative, agricultural lands will not be farmed by a lessee and FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 152 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the farming lease, however, would benefit wildlife by providing high-quality forage and wintering habitat and continued hunting opportunity for deer and pheasant with little expense to FWP.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Elk Island WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities for sportsmen and -women.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Elk Island WMA.